

Moran Votes to Restore Funding for Veterans Health Care

Vote Follows Meeting with Veterans Affairs Secretary to Discuss Additional Funding

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Congressman Jerry Moran today supported House passage of legislation that adds \$975 million to the budget of the Department of Veterans Affairs to cover a shortfall in health care funding for 2005. The funding came after a hearing before Moran and the House Veterans Affairs Committee where Secretary of Veterans Affairs (VA) Jim Nicholson revealed that the VA is facing a nearly \$1 billion shortfall.

"America's veterans deserve better," Moran said at the hearing. "The VA health care system must be available for all veterans and provide them with nothing less than excellent service. Clearly, inadequate resources and poor management is threatening the ability to meet the commitment to those who have honorably served our nation. This immediate funding will help fix the problem today, but we must work towards a long-term solution to accommodate the rising number of veterans who will enter the VA system in the future."

The shortfall in funding stems from apparent inaccurate forecasting by the VA on the needs of America's veterans. Thousands of new veterans have entered the system in recent years after serving in Afghanistan and Iraq. Secretary Nicholson testified that the current forecasting model used to determine demand and develop budgets has proven inadequate. To cover the shortage, the VA has been forced to delay spending on equipment and maintenance in VA facilities, as well as by borrowing funds from future years.

"The VA has got some major work to do to repair and improve its budget and funding systems," Moran said. "This process needs to be examined to ensure that Congress and the VA have accurate information from which to make sound budget decisions in the future."

In addition to the current \$1 billion shortfall, Secretary Nicholson said that the VA would experience larger budget shortfalls in 2006 and beyond. Moran committed to finding a long-term solution to the funding problem.

"It is unacceptable to make up for the shortfall by delaying spending or borrowing money, as it will only postpone the problem while reducing the quality of service," Moran said. "We must work to find ways to handle the new generation of American veterans and see that they receive the health care they have earned. As public servants, Congress and the Bush Administration must work together to meet the needs of the VA as it serves our nation's veterans."

Moran is a senior member of the Veterans Affairs Committee and has served as chairman of the Veterans Affairs Health Subcommittee.

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